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PREFACE

The Dharma School Division of the Buddhist Churches of America Ministerial Association published JISHIN KYO NINSHIN, a guide for Ministers and Dharma School teachers. Also published is the Pre-School Teacher's Guide and Student Workbook. To be published now is the Kindergarten Teacher's Guide and Workbook under the guidance of the Department of Buddhist Education Committee.

Some aims of the Grade Level Lesson plan books are to:

1. help students discover their true selves
2. help students realize Amida's wisdom and compassion
3. help students to acquire knowledge of Buddhism generally and Jodo-Shinshu in particular
4. help students develop character
5. help students feel gratitude in the nembutsu
6. help students apply Buddhism to the needs of daily life
7. help students to make decisions and develop critical thinking skills
8. help students to be confident as Buddhists in a Christian society
9. help students to work with family, friends, temple and community
10. help students develop awareness of and sympathy for the entire world and universe in which they live.
The Kindergarten Child

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An important aspect of a kindergarten child is the emotions of the child.

For 3 or 4 years of their life, they are at home most of the time, eating, sleeping, playing, going places with Mommy or Daddy, and may be attending for limited hours a Nursery School or Day Care Center. One day, when the child is 4 1/2 years of age, he or she is taken to kindergarten with strange people and stays there for several hours at a time each day of the week for months in a row. About 3 out of 10 children will have the “Why can’t I stay home?” syndrome. The other 7 children will have already experienced schools—nursery schools—and are therefore more reluctant about regular school and Dharma School.

In order to keep these children interested and enthused about coming to the Temple, we must and should develop activities that a child will enjoy and learn from at the same time. We must also create a warm atmosphere so that the child feels secure and important.

Teachers of the kindergarten class should show or make an effort to show certain qualities: a warm and caring personality, patience, ability to lavish praise, attention to their needs and curiosities, a degree of firmness that won’t fill the child with terror, and creative talents that will keep the child interested and content.
The Family and Home and Temple

A family is a place where a mind lives with other minds. If these minds love each other the home will be as beautiful as a flower garden.

A disciple should see to it that his family observe the teachings of Buddha. Especially should they cherish respect and consideration for their Buddhist teacher. They should treat him with courtesy, attend to and observe his instructions, and always have an offering for him. Then the teacher of Buddha's Dharma should rightly understand the teaching, rejecting wrong interpretations, emphasizing the right, and should seek to lead believers along a smooth path. If a family follows this course, keeping the true teaching for its center, it will thrive happily.

Our Buddhist Family

1. Our family centers its life around Amida Buddha.
2. Our family worships daily before the family shrine.
3. Our family attends temple regularly and gives full support.
4. Our family builds a home that is physically and spiritually clean.
5. Our family loves the young and respects the elders.
6. Our family cherishes peace and harmony.
7. Our family upholds the dignity of work.
8. Our family values learning.
9. Our family extends a helping hand of compassion to all people.
南无阿弥陀佛
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU
We say "Namu Amida Butsu" and Amida Buddha answers, "Here, here I am with you."
Amida Buddha says,
"I love all things,
I love little animals,
I love trees and flowers and
I love you."
And we say,
"Thank you Amida Buddha, Thank you."
Amida Buddha's love reaches to the moon
Amida Buddha's love reaches to the sun
Amida Buddha's love reaches to the stars
ONE BIG WORLD

This is a big, big world
In it are many kinds of flowers, plants and trees
Green ones, pink ones, yellow ones. Many kinds.
Amida Buddha loves them all.

This is a big, big world
In it are many kinds of animals.
Puppies, fat kittens, funny monkeys
Fierce tigers, roaring lions. Many kinds.
Amida Buddha loves them all.

This is a big, big world
In it are many kinds of fish
Pink salmon, goldfish, whales
Swordfish, wiggly eels, crocodiles. Many kinds.
Amida Buddha loves them all.

This is a big, big world.
In it are many kinds of children. Fat ones, skinny ones.
Black, white, yellow and brown ones. Many kinds.
Amida Buddha loves them all.
Amida Buddha loves me.
The Dharma guides me.
The Sangha helps me.
Namu-Amida-Butsu.
This is a fish.
This is a seashell.
Amida Buddha surrounds all
Life with deep compassion.
This is a mother goose.
These are her goslings.
The mother loves her goslings
And Amida Buddha loves them all.
He loves them like a mother.
The young Dharma student is thinking.
The love of the Amida Buddha fills the sky.
The love of the Amida Buddha fills the whole world
The love of the Amida Buddha fills all things.
Namu-Amida-Butsu.
Amida Buddha loves all children
And all children love Amida Buddha.
We love him and call His Name.
We say, “Namu-Amida-Butsu.”
This is a picture of Sakyamuni Buddha. Sakyamuni Buddha told us of Amida Buddha and His deep love for all living creatures. We are thankful to Sakyamuni Buddha.
Amida Buddha loves all things. He wants us to love them too.
This is a picture of St. Shinran. Sakyamuni Buddha told the world of Amida Buddha. St. Shinran is the founder of Jodo Shinshu. We are thankful to St. Shinran.
I am a link in Amida Buddha’s golden chain of love that stretches around the world. I must keep my link bright and strong.
Amida Buddha and I
Buddha is the head of my family

Hotoke Sama
My Family

[Four outlines of different hairstyles for family members]
My name is
I am

years old
I live at
This is my Temple
I like to go to Dharma School
This is Rev. ________________.
We also call him “Sensei”
My class teachers are:
With my hands I learn
to
Gassho
We sit quietly in the Hondo and listen
My Dana
We are all Buddha’s children
I recite the Nembutsu—Namu Amida Butsu
I'M BUDDHA'S CHILD

I'm Buddha's child,
I'll tap, tap, tap
Let's clap, clap, clap,
Let's clap and tap.

I'm Buddha's child
and so are you.
Let's shake, shake, shake
How do you do?

I'm Buddha's child,
I'll hold your hands.
Let's swing, swing, swing,
Let's be good friends,

I'm Buddha's child,
I'll smile, smile, smile,
Let's turn, turn, turn
We'll play awhile.

Let's meet again,
We will, I know,
Goodbye, my friends,
Goodbye, gassho.
I'm Buddha's Child
(For Piano)
I'm Buddha's Child

Starting position: Stand erect with hand on sides. Face audience.

Hands in Gassho

1. I'M BUD — DHA'S CHILD.

I'LL TAP, TAP, TAP.

LET'S CLAP, CLAP, CLAP.

LET'S CLAP AND TAP.
I'm Buddha's Child

FACE PARTNER:

Hands in Gassho

2. I'M BUD - DHA'S CHILD,

L. Hand at waist
R. Hand point to partner

AND SO ARE YOU.

Let's shake, shake, shake.

Same as above

How do you do?
FACE PARTNER:

I'm Buddha's Child

Hands in Gassho

3. I'M BUD — DHA'S CHILD.

I'LL HOLD YOUR HANDS.

Swing Swing Swing back to center position

LETS SWING, SWING, SWING.

Same as above Swing out Swing in Swing back to center position

LETS BE GOOD FRIENDS.
I'm Buddha's Child

FACE AUDIENCE:

Hands in Gassho

4. I'M BUDHA'S CHILD.

Nod R.  Nod L.  Nod R.

I'LL SMILE, SMILE, SMILE.

Starting with R.F. turn, stamping with each beat, completing circle with 7 beats.

Turn clockwise R.F.  Turn clockwise L.F.  Continue turning R.F.

LET'S TURN, TURN, TURN.

L.F.  R.F.  L.F.

Ending circle with R.F. (Face front)

LET'S PLAY A WHILE.
I'm Buddha's Child

FACE AUDIENCE: Form a chain by holding hands.

5. LET'S MEET AGAIN;

LET go hands (break chain) GOOD BYE, MY FRIENDS,

GOOD — BYE, GAS SHO.
Kindergarten Dharma School Guide
Parent Education

The following pages are for parents to study and share with their child and family; to assist in keeping the Dharma School child interested in his/her religious education during the week as well as the weekend.

Etsuko Steimetz

THREE TREASURES

Leader:

Hard is it to be born into human life. Now we are living it. Difficult is it to hear the Teachings of the Blessed One. Now we hear it. If we do not deliver ourselves in the present life, no hope is there that we shall be freed from suffering and sorrow in the ocean of birth and death. Let us reverently take refuge in the Three Treasures of the Truth.

Leader and Sangha (in unison):

I TAKE REFUGE IN BUDDHA. May we all together absorb into ourselves the principle of Your Way to Enlightenment and awaken in ourselves the Supreme Will.

I TAKE REFUGE IN DHARMA. May we all together be submerged in the depth of the Doctrine and gain wisdom as deep as the ocean.

I TAKE REFUGE IN SANGHA., May we all together become units in true accord in Your Life of Harmony, in a spirit of Universal Brotherhood, freed from the bondage of selfishness.

Leader:

Even through ages of myriads of kalpas hard is it to hear such an excellent, profound and wonderful doctrine. Now we are able to hear and receive it. Let us thoroughly understand the true meaning of Tathagatha’s Teaching.
What is the objective of the Buddhist Dharma School?

The objective of the Dharma School is to develop individuals who will live in accord with the basic aspiration of the Buddhist tradition throughout history. The basic aspiration consists of the following vows:

1. To help alleviate the suffering of all people and all forms of life. Since interdependence, beginning with the most obvious and extending to the profoundly subtle, is the fundamental reality of life, each of us is involved in the well-being of all others. Therefore, as long as there is one unhappy being in the world, no one's happiness is complete. Thus, the Buddhist strives for happiness of all people, regardless of race, country, or ideology, and of all forms of life, regardless of how mighty or insignificant they may be.

2. To recognize clearly the limitations of self, characterized by self-centered ignorance and destructive passions, and to work tirelessly for their transformation into energies for good and positive action.

3. To learn, master, and realize as much as possible the accumulated wisdom of the ages, so that one may be successful in fulfilling the dual vows of helping all people and transforming the self.

4. To follow the path of the Buddha, so that one may enter the stream of becoming to eventually attain the highest realization of Buddhahood as the final conclusion of the purpose of life.

The Buddhist is not deterred by the immense challenge of his aspirations, for he knows the practical approach to the fulfillment is to take each step, one at a time, however small they may be, for he knows that what is more significant is not the ultimate goal but the process leading to that goal. The first steps must be taken from the earliest period of conscious childhood.

How can we teach Buddhism more effectively?

Parents and teachers can teach Buddhism to others effectively, if we keep in mind the following points and constantly try to perfect ourselves in each of the three ways:

1. Faith: First of all we must understand and appreciate the teachings in order to impart it to others. Shan-tao, the Fifth Patriarch of Shin Buddhism, expressed this thought in a very famous statement:

   “First to believe in the teaching oneself; then endeavor to teach others to believe.” Faith is awakening to the truth of Buddha’s teaching. It is ultimately the process of becoming the Buddha. When we realize its significance, we will desire to share this understanding.

2. Gratitude: In the Dhammapada there is a well-known passage which reads:

   “The gift of religious exceeds all gifts; the sweetness of religion exceeds all sweetness.”

   As we receive the gift of Buddha’s teaching and realize the “sweetness” of its truth for daily living, we become deeply grateful. This gratitude, arising spontaneously from faith, is the motive for teaching Buddhism to others.

3. Sincerity: Parents or teachers must be, above all else, sincere. Techniques of teaching and knowledge of subject matter are insufficient when sincerity is lacking. Natural sincerity should be nurtured as an outflow of faith and understanding.
We must develop faith, gratitude, and sincerity until they become a free and spontaneous expression of our lives. Only then can there be any effective teaching of Buddhism to others.

**Which is better to teach first, general Buddhism or Shinshu?**

First, it must be remembered that general Buddhism and Shinshu are not two different teachings. Buddhism is one, and they are merely emphasis on different aspects of an integrated whole, although it is true that the emphasis that is expressed in Shinshu is more closely related to everyday living.

Second, as a Shin Buddhist we must appreciate Shinshu awareness of compassion of Amida Buddha. If we understand this we can explain Shinshu through various means: life of Sakyamuni Buddha, parables and Jatakas in the scriptures, fables and stories taken from books, and current events and daily happenings.

Third, it can be easier for children to understand concrete events that occurred in history. For this reason the life of Buddha and general Buddhism might be taught before Shinshu. The understanding of Shinshu requires a certain amount of maturity of both life-experience and background in Buddhism.

Fourth, the important thing, however, is to realize that the compassion of Amida Buddha can be understood by everyone, especially a child. This understanding is not necessarily conveyed to the child by words; rather, it may be conveyed by the attitude of the teacher and the atmosphere in which the child is being taught. Both the attitude and the atmosphere must be expressive of the compassion of Amida Buddha.
Buddhist Etiquette

THE BUDDHIST CHURCHES OF AMERICA "TEMPLES"

Officially founded on September 1, 1899, in San Francisco, what is today the Buddhist Churches of America began as an overseas missionary program of the Jodoshinshu Hongwanjiha headquartered in Kyoto, Japan. Formerly known as the American Buddhist Organization (Beikoku Bukkyodan—米国仏教団), the name was changed in 1944 to the Buddhist Churches of America or BCA. This was done by the national organization of Buddhists then headquartered in the Topaz Relocation Center in Topaz, Utah, one of the many camps in which Japanese and Japanese-Americans were incarcerated during World War II. It was an attempt to reorganize and “Americanize” the Sangha and to shift emphasis from the Japanese to the English language.

There has been a move in recent times to change the word “church” to “temple”. The objection to the word “church” lies in its meaning of “house of God” since the Buddhists deny the existence of a supreme creator God. The word “temple” is preferred since the Japanese word “tera — て嬼” and the usual English translation “temple” both mean simply “a space marked off for a religious purpose”.

To date, the BCA temples have been largely ethnic institutions composed almost entirely of Japanese and Japanese-American members. There has, however, been a small but continuous participation in temple life of non-Japanese priests and laymen since the early 1900’s.

Since Jodoshinshu is a layman-centered, non-monastic sect of Buddhism, the buildings of the temple complex are designed to serve a lay community of Buddhists rather than a separate order of monks. The Jodoshinshu clergy is by tradition and doctrine a married clergy, and its temples are committed not to a mountain seclusion but to cities and towns. Unlike other Buddhist traditions, the Sangha in Jodoshinshu refers to all Buddhists and not just to the order of monks or priests. Thus, the buildings in a typical BCA temple complex serve three basic purposes:

1. A ceremonial or ritual purpose: This takes place in the Hondō or main hall of the complex. The Hondō houses the altar and is the main building of the complex. The Hondō is sometimes incorrectly referred to as the Seidō ( 神堂— “sacred hall”), a word used in reference to the main hall of a Confucian temple or to the sanctuary of a Christian church. A large temple may have one or more additional altar rooms usually referred to as “chapels”, which are used for family memorial services. There may also be a Nokotsudo (骨堂—cremated remains hall) or columbarium. These may either be a part of the Hondō or a separate building.

2. An instructional purpose: There is usually a classroom building or area of classrooms for instruction. Instruction ranges from Buddhism, Japanese language, Japanese and/or Buddhist culture to crafts, cooking, etc. Meetings, community programs, etc. also take place in these classrooms.

3. A social-cultural purpose: Usually called the Social Hall, this building invariably contains a large kitchen and seating area for banquets, shows, receptions, various cultural events and the serving of Otoki or vegetarian meals after Buddhist holiday services.
In some cases all three buildings are combined into one multi-purpose building. Some temples have gymnasiums, teahouses, bell towers, minister’s residence, etc.

Traditionally, the temples were not only religious centers, but social, cultural, educational and economic self-help centers as well. Prior to World War II, almost the whole of Japanese life outside the home took place at the temple. This was in keeping with the tradition of village temples in Japan being the center of village life. This tradition was reinforced in America by a history of strong anti-Japanese sentiment, especially in the Pacific Coast states. In the early period, old Christian churches were bought and converted into temples. It is only in more recent times that new temples have been built along more Buddhist lines. The Christian influence in architecture, music and service format, however, is unmistakable. Recent trends have shown a return to more traditional forms of architecture and liturgical music.

In the traditional language of Jodoshinshu, in its architecture, and in its liturgical music and ritual movements, there is a strong sense of the horizontal rather than the vertical. References are to the “inner” and “outer”, to the “left” and “right”, rather than to “above” and “below”. In architecture, the roof is the main element of the buildings, with a sweeping horizontal thrust. The buildings are rectangular with the entrance on the widest side rather than on the narrow side as is the case in Christian buildings. As you enter the building, the altar area will be along the entire length of the opposite wall. The eye is drawn from side to side rather than upwards. The seating area is tatami mats placed between the many pillars which support the roof. The effect is one of walking through a forest towards the altar of Enlightenment — recalling the origins of Buddhism in the forests of India.

In BCA temples, the tendency has been to use a central aisle with the entrance to the building placed at one narrow end and the altar at the other end. Although this has solved the “problem” of seating in chairs the largest number of people in the space allotted, it has also resulted in a confusing clash of lines — a long narrow seating arrangement with a central aisle which draws the eye upward, in a building whose lines are otherwise horizontal.

The expressions of Jodoshinshu awakening have always been horizontal. There is a strong sense of being in touch with the earth, of being supported by it, of being rooted in it. The expression is not one of going upward and out of what we are, but one of going down and inward to what we really are. Instead of soaring vertically, it is a vibrating horizontally. This horizontality will be encountered again and again in Buddhist music, dance, ritual, etc.

**HONDÔ — 本堂 — “main hall”:** The Hondô is the principal building of the temple complex and is divided into two parts: the Naijin (内陣 — “inner area”) or altar area, and the Gejin (外陣 — “outer area”) or seating area. With the rise of the Pure Land schools in Japan, a new type of architecture was created to meet the needs of its followers. Prior to the 13th century in Japan, the Naijin took up the major portion of the floor space of a temple. This was to accommodate the larger number of monks who lived in monastic surroundings. Rituals were conducted by the monks alone. Laymen did not participate in the rituals but only attended as observers in a small area called the Gejin. The new emphasis placed upon communal gatherings of laymen and priests together by the Pure Land schools resulted in the shrinking of the Naijin area and the enlarging of the Gejin area.
This is particularly the case with Jodoshinshu where Shinran Shonin had effected the most radical changes in the definition of the Buddhist clergy and its function. Until Shinran, Buddhist monks maintained a celibate life of secluded practice in mountain monasteries or taught in metropolitan temples that catered to the aristocracy. They were required to cut off all ties with their families and the secular world. Shinran, however, viewed himself as being "neither monk nor layman" (非僧非俗—Hiso Hijoku), a position which gave rise to a new definition of Buddhist clergy, one which is perhaps best translated as "priest". Shinran considered all beings as "fellow travellers" (同行—Ondogyo) and "fellow brothers and sisters" (同胞—Ondobô) on the same path of the Nembutsu. Laymen as well as priests were to be participants in ceremonies and rituals and not simply observers. Later history was to complicate this egalitarian view of Shinran with the creation of a hereditary priesthood in Jodoshinshu.

Although the idea of communal gatherings of laymen and priests in the temple was to greatly change the course of Japanese Buddhism, certain distinctions between priests and laymen continued. One such rule is the tradition that only a priest may enter the Naijin and this only when he or she is in full vestments. There are, no doubt, sociological reasons for this rule, but the religious reason is fairly clear. The Naijin is a representation of the Buddhist concept of the universe and, more importantly, of the realm of Enlightenment. Thus, only one who was well versed in the meaning of the symbols found in the Naijin was prepared enough to enter it. This meant a priest in full vestments, full vestments being a sign of his qualification. One who entered the Naijin had to know what he was entering into; what was required of him in thought, speech and action so that the ritual he performed resulted in the deepening of understanding and naturalness of action which was his goal.

In Jodoshinshu the order was reversed — the Naijin and the ritual performed in it was ideally the natural expression of what one had been awakened to. The ritual was in praise of the Truth called Amida that one had been made aware of. It was not a means to that awareness but rather the result of it. Like the Nembutsu, the chanting and other ritual acts were seen as the expression of gratitude and joy which naturally arose from the awakening experience. In orthodox language, they are the expressions of gratitude and joy for the Wisdom and Compassion bestowed upon us by Amida Buddha.

Short of this awakening experience, however, the ritual and Nembutsu nevertheless have a powerful teaching function. Just as the formal study of the doctrine prepares the mind to truly receive the Dharma, so chanting and Nembutsu, and the physical movements of the ritual prepare the other five senses to receive the Dharma as it is (sono mama). Together they are the practices which reorient our six senses from the normal order of things to the natural order flowing beneath them. As regards the rule of entering the Naijin, practical considerations have made the rule more flexible in BCA temples.

GEJIN—外陣— "outer area": The Gejin is the seating area of the Hondō and takes up approximately three-fourths of the total floor space. Chairs or pews have replaced tatami mats. At the front of the Gejin, directly in front of the main altar, is a large Kōrō (香爐) or incense burner of dark metal on a lacquered-wood stand. The Kōrō is most often decorated with figures of dragons, elephants, Chinese lions and/or lotuses. A number of smaller Kōrō may be found to the left and right of the central Kōrō. On the lacquered-wood stand will be a round, lacquered-wood box called a Kōgo (香盒), which is filled with a ground incense. This incense is placed on the glowing embers in the Kōrō and is the basic ritual of Oshōkō (御焼香— "burning incense").
Hanging from the ceiling of the Gejin or on pillars or walls of the Gejin, are two types of lanterns called Tōrō (灯籠).

The first is a jar-shaped lantern of metal usually attached to pillars or walls of the Gejin. The second is a hexagonal lantern of metal suspended from the ceiling. The lanterns are very often donated by members and have the donor’s name and the circumstances of the donation engraved on them.

A large offertory box is often found either at the entrance to the Gejin or next to the central Kōrō. In some cases the offertory box, called the Saisenbako (賽銭箱) is built into the stand upon which the Kōrō stands. The Kanji or Chinese characters on the box most often read:

“Saisen” — 資財 — “offering”
“Jōzai” — 淨財 — “pure-offering”
“Kisha” — 麗検 — “joyously-discarding”

The Kanji imply that Dana or “giving” is to be done without ulterior motive; without the desire for thanks or recognition, without any self-centered thoughts.

Most temples will also have an organ or piano and one or two speaker’s stands in the Gejin.

NAIJIN — 内陣 — “inner area”: The Naijin or altar area is made up of one, three, or five altars, depending upon the size of the Hondō. The Naijin is anywhere from a few inches to several feet above the level of the Gejin (traditionally only a few inches).

MAKISHŌJI — 卷障子 — “folding shoji”: The Naijin is usually closed off from the Gejin by a series of folding Shoji or paper screens. The wooden lattice of the Shoji is painted in black lacquer and decorated with metal ornaments. In some temples the Naijin will be closed off by a simple curtain.

FUSUMA — 柙 — “sliding door”: The Fusuma is a sliding door faced with a solid sheet of heavy paper. The paper may be plain gold in color or painted with phoenix birds, wisteria, etc. Larger temples will have Fusuma on either side of the Makishoku.

MISU — 翠簾 — “green blind”: The Misu is a blind made of thin strips of bamboo edged in brocade. They are suspended from the cross beams between the front pillars of the Naijin. They were originally used as sun and wind screens in palace architecture. The rolled up blinds are held up by metal holders decorated with tassels.

RANMA — 檻間 — “transom space”: The Ranma is a transom carving found directly over the Makishōji. The carved wood decoration may be a simple geometric design or an elaborate carving of birds, flowers, heavenly beings, etc. In Jodoshinshu temples, the Ranma carving is most often of peacocks and peony flowers in gold leaf. The Golden Peacock and the Golden Peony are the bird and flower associated with the Buddha Amida.
The Gaku isa tablet or framed plaque placed above the Makishōji. It will either be a quotation from the sutras in Chinese characters or the characters “Ken-Shin” ( 見真 ) meaning “seer of Truth”. This is the posthumous honorary title bestowed upon Shinran Shonin by the Emperor Meiji.

The central altar enshrines the Gohonzon or “central or principal object of reverence”. The Gohonzon of Jodoshinshu is Amida Buddha which may take one of three forms: a standing statue of wood, a picture scroll or a scroll with the characters “Na Mu A Mi Da Butsu” written on it. Rennyo Shonin states that a painted picture of Amida Buddha is preferable to a statue and that the written characters “Na Mu A Mi Da Butsu” is preferable to the painted picture. This is in recognition of the tendency of man to look upon Amida Buddha as a concrete “thing” of definite form and physical attributes and to rely upon it as one would an anthropomorphic god. The six-character scroll is thus preferred by Rennyo Shonin over that of the statue or picture representation of the reality called Amida Buddha. Be that as it may, the statue of Amida Buddha is still the most common form of the Gohonzon.

The statue is always a standing statue of wood, usually gilded in gold leaf. The statue leans slightly forward, representing the dynamic aspect of Wisdom-Compassion. The “mudra” or hand gesture is the “an-i-in jōbongeshō” ( 安慈印上品下 生 ) or the gesture of tranquillity and protection, signifying the entry of Amida Buddha into the realm of sentient beings for the purpose of teaching and effecting their enlightenment. The thumb and index fingers of both hands are joined to form the circle or wheel of perfection, i.e., the Dharma of the Buddha, perfect and eternal, having neither beginning nor end. The right hand is raised to shoulder level with palm facing outward symbolizing Wisdom, the attainment of perfect enlightenment, the Nirvana world. The left hand hangs pendant with palm facing outward, symbolizing Compassion, the world of Samsara, and the turning of all sentient beings to the truth of the Dharma. The raised hand also represents Light and the pendant hand Life, Amida being the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. Between and slightly above the eyes is a spot called the “Byakugo” ( 白毫 ), originally said to be a tuft of white hair which curled to the right and one of the 32 physical marks of a Buddha. The Byakugo is said to emit rays of light and is symbolic of the third or spiritual eye. The “Nikkei” ( 肉髻 ) or protuberance on the top of the head is another of the 32 physical marks of the Buddha. It is the “bump of Spiritual Wisdom”.

Dharma Kindergarten Workbook
The statute stands upon a throne or dais in the shape of a lotus blossom. The symbolism of the lotus is highly developed in Buddhism. The lotus grows in muddy water but rises above the water to bloom — pure, beautiful, and unaffected by the defilement which surrounds it. Unlike other plants, the lotus flower at full bloom already has fully developed seeds at its base — that is to say, the flower and seeds develop simultaneously. This is related to the Dharma and Enlightenment which also arise simultaneously. In the Pure Land tradition, the lotus flower is associated with sentient beings and the offering of lotus flowers to the Buddha is symbolic of abandoning one’s imagined nature and returning to one’s true nature.

Behind the statue and attached to the throne or dais is the “Kohai” 神道 or “background of light” from which is derived the halo of western religions. Two types of kohai are used. First is the kohai in the shape of a boat standing on end. It is carved with intricate tracery and is gold-leafed. A lotus flower motif is carved just behind the head of the statue. The second and more common form of the kohai is a half-boat shaped background topped by 48 spokes radiating from a circle behind the head of the statue. The spokes represent rays of light and the number 48 is for the 48 vows made by the Bodhisattva Dharmakara, who perfected them to become Amida Buddha.

TOCHÔ — 斗帳 —: The Tochô is a curtain of hemp, metal or brocade which outlines the body of the statue. Originally, the curtain completely hid the statue and was raised when ceremonies took place.

KEMAN — 斗帳 —: Derived from neck and hair ornaments worn by men in ancient India, the Keman is made of cloth or metal and is attached to the top center of the Tochô and partially covers the face of the Buddha statue. The implication here is that the Truth or face of Amida Buddha is never seen completely, that each man and each sentient being sees from his own unique and peculiar point of view, and that there is always a different or deeper view of the Truth to be seen. This ornament is mentioned in the Larger Sutra as hanging from the branches of the Jeweled Trees in the Pure Land.

GOKÚDEN — 御宮殿 — “honorific palace hall”: The Gohonzon is traditionally placed in a structure called the Gokûden. It is one of the structures in the Pure Land mentioned in the Meditation Sutra. A replica of Japanese palace architecture, the Gokûden houses the Gohonzon and is profusely ornamented. In the Hongwanji School, the pillars and ornaments are all gold in color. Embellishing the roof beams are carved figures of elephants, lions and dragons, all guardian animals of the Buddha and symbolizing the Buddha’s spiritual power, resounding voice of Truth and majesty, respectively. The style of construction is said to be in Chinese T’ang Dynasty style.
SHUMIDAN — “Sumeru-throne”: The Gokuden sits upon a rectangular dais or throne called the Shumidan. The throne is widest at the top and bottom and narrowest in the middle, resembling a flattened spool. This is said to be the shape of the cosmic mountain called Sumeru in Sanskrit. In Indian cosmology, Mt. Sumeru is the highest mountain in the center of our world system. The Shumidan is made of wood lacquered in red and black and decorated with floral, wave and animal designs which are brightly colored. A red railing encloses the top of the throne.
Three additional ornaments decorate the central altar.

SUMI YŌRAKU — 隈珠珞 — "corner-ornaments": Yoraku are necklace-like ornaments suspended from a canopy shaped like a lotus leaf. They are derived from ornaments worn around the neck and body of aristocratic men in ancient India. The idea of nobility being the result of birth was denied by Shakamuni Buddha who stated that nobility was the result of one's deeds and not the result of one's birth. The pair of Yoraku which hang from the roof corners of the Gokūden represents the attainment of nobility through noble deeds.

TSURI TÔRÔ — 鈴燈籠 — "suspended-lamp": This is an enclosed lamp suspended from the ceiling in front of the Gokūden. The lamp is made of metal incised with floral designs. The lamp is said to be derived from one made by Shakamuni Buddha for his disciples when traveling at night. The lamp was used to light the way at night and to avoid the accidental killing of insects and small creatures on the road.

KIKU RINTÔ—菊輪燈— "chrysanthemum circular lamp": This is an open oil lamp with a circular band over it. This "circle of light" represents Enlightenment, perfect, without beginning or end. The metal bands are decorated with a chrysanthemum pattern. Though they are oil lamps, fire laws have necessitated converting them into electric lamps. These lamps are also suspended from the ceiling in front of the Shumidan. The Rintô is mentioned in T'ang Dynasty records and was used in the Audience Hall of the Heian Court in Kyoto. The Kiku Rintô is particular to the Jodoshinshu Hongwan-jiha.
Next is a series of altar pieces used for ritual offerings which are placed before the Gohonzon.

**UAJOKU — 上卓 — “upper-table”:** The Uajoku is a small, gilded table on the Shumidan immediately in front of the Gohonzon. In a set arrangement called Shigusoku (四具足) or “four element arrangement”, the following offerings are placed:

**RŌSOKUTATE — 蜡燭立 — “candle-holder”:** This is a candlestick of dark metal placed to the rear center of the Uajoku.

**KASHA — 火舎 — “fire-house”:** The Kasha is a double-tiered incense burner of dark metal with a lid. It is placed immediately in front of the candlestick.

**KEBYŌ — 華瓶 — “flower-vase”:** The Kebyō is a bulb-shaped vase of dark metal. Although called a flower vase, it is a vessel used for the offering of water, the sustainer of all life. A branch of the Shikimi ( — Star Anise Tree) or other greenery is placed in it to symbolize flowing water. Only flowing water remains pure and is the symbol of the Dharma, ever-flowing, ever-pure.
BUPPANKI — 佛飯器 — “Buddha-food-vessel”: In addition to the “arrangement of four” mentioned above, two light metal, compote-like stands of mounded rice are placed on either side of the candlestick. The eastern equivalent of the “staff of life”, rice is the basic food. Offerings of rice on the altars other than that of the Buddha are referred to as Guhanki (供飯器, “offering-rice-vessel”). The pair of Buppanki is said to symbolize the Jodoshinshu concept of Jiri Rita Enman (自利利他円満), or the perfect integration and completion of self-benefit and benefitting others. The Buppanki is placed upon a wooden stand which is usually gold-leafed.

In recent times, the double Buppanki has been replaced by a single Buppanki placed in the Gokuden.

MAEJOKU — 前卓 — “front-table”: This is a large table ornately carved and lacquered, and placed in front of the Shumidan. Two basic arrangements of offerings are placed on the Maejoku.

1. MITSUGUSOKU — 三具足 — “three-element-arrangement”: The three elements are:

KÖRÖ — 香爐 “incense-burner”: This is a dark metal incense burner with three legs which is placed upon a gold-leafed wooden dais. Since Ming Dynasty times, the lid and sides of the burner have been decorated with lions, elephants, dragons or Kirin. Just as all tremble before the Lion (狮子), so do all evil beings tremble before the Buddha-Truth. The elephant (象) is the symbol of spiritual kingship and steadfast meditation. And just as the Dragon (龍) is said to be able to make a great rain from a single drop of water, so the Buddha can make a great good from a small one. The Kirin (麒麟) is a Chinese mythological animal with the body of a deer, the tail of an ox, the hooves of a horse and a single horn. The hair on its back is multicolored and its belly yellow. The Kirin is said to appear on the eve of auspicious events and as proof of the good government of a ruler.

In some cases, a celadon ceramic incense burner called a Dogôrô. (土香爐 “earthen-incense-burner”) is placed in front of the Körö (as you face the altar). It is used instead of the Körö except for special ceremonies.
ROSOKUTATE — 蜡燭立— "candle-stand": As you face the Maejoku, the Rōsokutate will be on the right side of the Kōro. It is a larger candleholder of dark metal on three legs and usually decorated with cranes. Cranes are said to live to be 1000 years old and are the symbol of longevity. For everyday use, white candles are used in BCA temples. For Buddhist holidays, red candles are used. For dedications, weddings and other similar occasions, gold candles are used with red candles as a substitute. For funerals, memorial services and other similar occasions, silver candles are used with white candles as a substitute. In far eastern tradition, red is the color of happiness and felicitations while white is the color of mourning. In Japanese style candles, a rolled paper wick is used which causes the flame to flicker, giving the effect of radiating light.

KAHIN — 花瓶— "flower-vase": This is a heavy metal flower vase of dark metal with a flaring lip. It is placed to the left of the Kōro as you face the altar. Formal arrangements of flowers and branches are made in the Kahin. The art of flower arrangement in Japan is derived from this offering of flowers in a vase to the Buddha, which began among the Buddhists in China. In India, the custom was to scatter flower petals or pile flowers on a table. Traditionally, no flowers with thorns, disagreeable smell or bitter taste are used. Poisonous plants are not used.

In American usage, the color of flowers and candles are a mixture of East and West. White flowers and candles are usually used for funerals and memorial services since white is the color of mourning. But white is also used in weddings as it is the color of purity in western tradition. Likewise, red candles and flowers are often used for Buddhist holidays regardless of whether or not it is a memorial observance or a birthday.

2. GOGUSOKU — 五具足— "five-element-arrangement": The five elements are: The Kōro is again placed in the center; next a Rōsokutate is placed on either side of the Kōro; and finally, a Kahin is placed on the outside of each Rōsokutate.

In the Mitsugusoku arrangement, the candle is on the right and represents the world of Enlightenment. The flowers are on the left and represent the world of Delusion or Samsara. The candle and flower represent the worlds of Nirvana and Samsara, respectively. The incense burner is placed between the two seemingly opposite worlds — the sometimes beautiful but always fragile and fleeting world of Samsara on the left, and the eternal and unchanging world of Nirvana on the right. These two opposite worlds, as they are, are identified or brought together in Oneness as symbolized by the burning incense which comes to life and begins the process of dying at the exact same moment of being lit.
In the Gogusoku, or more formal arrangement, the flowers are placed on the outside to represent the outer, ever-changing world of Samsara. The candles are placed on the inside to represent the inner, unchanging world of Enlightenment. The Kōro is again in the center, pointing to the Oneness of the two worlds of Samsara and Nirvana, of Namu and Amidabutsu, of myself and Amida.

Mizuhiki & Uchishiki: During the lifetime of Shakamuni Buddha, a custom was established of spreading out fine pieces of cloth for the Buddha to sit on when preaching to his disciples and others assembled to hear him. The cloth would be spread out and the disciples would bow in reverence to the Buddha with their foreheads touching the cloth at his feet. The cloth later came to decorate the altar tables of temples on special occasions of hearing the Buddha's teaching.

MIZUHIKI — 卓." — "table-enclosure": The Mizuhiki is a rectangular cloth of rich brocade which covers the front and sides of the Maejoku. It is also referred to as a Shitakake (下掛 — "pendant-hanging").

UCHISHIKI — 打敷 — "strike-spread out": The Uchishiki is a triangular piece of cloth which hangs over the front of the Maejoku over the Mizuhiki. The cloth is also of rich brocade using gold and silver thread. The literal translation "strike-spread out" refers to the origin of the cloth which was "spread out" for Shakamuni Buddha, whereupon the disciples bowed in reverence "striking" their foreheads to the ground. Smaller Uchishiki are draped over the Uajoku and tables of the other altars.

In the time of Rennyo Shonin in the 15th century, the sleeves of the kimono of deceased persons were donated to temples and made into these altar cloths. Later they came to be made from fine silk brocades. The Uchishiki is lined with white cloth so that it may be reversed for funerals in the absence of a pure white Uchishiki.
RAIBAN — 礼盘 — "ceremonial-dais": Directly in front of the Maejoku is a set of two tables, a dais, and a stand used for special formal ceremonies by the officiating priest. The Raiban is a low dais approximately 2½ feet square with a tatami matting on top. The officiant sits in Japanese style on this dais and leads the chanting. In some cases, the Raiban will be somewhat narrowed and taller for sitting on in western style.

MUKÔJOKU — 向卓 — "facing-table": This is a small table placed between the Raiban and the Maejoku. On this table is placed the Rikkyōdai (立経台 — "standing-sutra-rack") a rack holding four scrolls containing the three principal sutras of Jōdo-shinshu in Chinese.

WAKIJOKU — 侧卓 — "side-table": On the left side of the Raiban is another small table on which are placed two incense vessels.

Zukōki — 染香器 — "smearing-incense-vessel": This is a small, lidded cup of brass on a brass stand. It contains a finely powdered incense. This powdered incense is rubbed on the hands and robe of the officiant at the beginning of the Raiban ceremony.

Egōrō — 焼香爐 — "handle-incense-burner": This is a small incense burner with a long handle attached to it. It is most often in the shape of a lotus flower. It is held by the officiant at the beginning and end of the Raiban ceremony to cense the altar.

KEIDAI — 磬台 — "kei-stand": To the right of the Raiban is a rack from which is suspended a small metal plate called the Kei. This is struck with a wooden mallet at the beginning and end of the chanting.

The Raiban has its origins in Tendai Buddhism and is first mentioned in China in Sui and T’ang Dynasty writings. In Japan it has been in use since Heian Times.

TENGAI — 天蓋 — "heavenly-canopy": The Tengai is an ornately decorated canopy which is sometimes suspended from the ceiling directly over the Raiban. This canopy is mentioned in the sutras as one of the ornaments of the Pure Land and is said to be “suspended in the empty sky”.

WAKIDAN — 肌壇 — "side-altar": The next series of altars or shrines will be to the right and left of the Gohonzon. To the right as you face the Gohonzon is a smaller version of the central altar which enshrines a picture of Shinran Shōnin, the founder of Jōdo-shinshu. In the Wakidan on the left is a picture of Rennyo Shōnin or one of the other hereditary heads of the Jōdo-shinshu Sect. The two altars are similar to that of the central altar, though on a smaller scale. The offerings on the Maejoku are in the Mitsugusoku or “three element arrangement”. On special occasions, Uchishiki are draped over the Maejoku.

YOMA — 余間 — "remaining-space": The last series of altars are in the Yoma or remaining space to the extreme right and left of the central altar. On the extreme right is enshrined a picture of Shōtoku Taishi and on the extreme left a picture of the Seven Patriarchs of Jōdo-shinshu.

Shinran Shōnin — 賓聖人 — 1173-1262 A.D. Founder of Jodoshinshu and one of the great figures of Japanese Buddhism.
Rennyo Shōnin — 藤如上人 — 1414-1499 A.D. The eighth hereditary Gomonshu from the blood line of Shinran Shōnin. He was largely responsible for the restoration of Jodoshinshu teachings as a major force in Japanese Buddhism and for organizing the sect into its present form.
Shōtoku Taishi  — 聖徳太子 — 572-622 A.D. An Imperial Prince, the second son of Emperor Yōmei. An ardent Buddhist and strong supporter of its acceptance and spread in Japan, Shōtoku Taishi is regarded as the Father of Japanese Buddhism.

The Seven Patriarchs: The seven spiritual fathers of the Pure Land teaching according to Shinran Shōnin and regarded by Shinran as Bodhisattvas.

India:
- Nagarjuna (pterocarpus) — 2nd or 3rd century A.D.
- Vasubandhu (天親) — 5th century A.D.

China:
- T’an Luan (昙鸾) — 476-542 A.D.
- Tao ch’o (道経) — 562-654 A.D.
- Shan tao (善導) — 613-681 A.D.

Japan:
- Genshin (源信) — 942-1017 A.D.
- Hōnen (了然) — 1133-1212 A.D.

In some temples, the candlestick in the Yoma altars and the left altar of the Waki-dan is in the form of a tall oil lamp called the Kikutō (菊灯 — “chrysanthemum-lamp”). This is a metal oil lamp with a chrysanthemum pattern.

MAWARIJOKU — 回卓 — “bordering-tables”: Also called Kyōjoku (経卓 — “sutra-tables”) this is a series of low lacquered wood tables forming two lines, one on either side of the central altar. On the tables are black lacquered boxes containing the Wasans or hymns written by Shinran Shōnin and rectangular boxes containing the three sutras of Jodoshinshu. The priests will sit behind these tables during the ritual. In BCA temples, taller tables with chairs are used instead of the traditional low tables which require sitting on the floor.

When offerings of mochi, manju, fruits, and or vegetables are made, two types of stands are used.
**GOBUNSHÔBAKO** — 御文箋箱 — “honorific-letters-box”: The Gobunshôbako is a black and gold laquered box which contains the Gobunshô or letters of Rennyo Shônin.

Although traditionally kept on an altar of the Naijin, in BCA temples it is most often found on the podium in the Gejin. These letters are read by the priest at the end of a service in a formal reading style.

“Anakashiko” — At the end of each reading from the Gobunshô, the priest will say the word “anakashiko” two times as he closes the book and raises it to his head. Anakashiko is an ancient expression in use during the late Heian and early Kamakura periods. It has the meaning of “osore ōku mottainai”. A rough translation might be “These venerable and awe-inspiring words are wasted on beings such as we.” It is a formal expression of extreme indebtedness and gratitude.

**GODENSHÔBAKO** — 御仏頭箱 — “honorific-transmission-writings-box”: The Godenshôbako is very similar to the Gobunshôbako but contains the Godensho, the traditional biography of Shinran Shônin. The Godensho or sections of it are traditionally read in formal style at Hoonko, the memorial observance for Shinran Shônin. The two crests of the Hongwanji-ha decorate both boxes.

**KERÔ** — 華籠 — “flower-basket”: The Kerô is a flat metal platter with three sets of cords hanging from its rim. The cords are white, red and green in color. The Kerô is not left in the altar area but is brought out for use in a ceremony called “Sange” (散華 — “scattering-flowers”). The scattering of flower petals was an important ritual in Indian Buddhism. Although Far Eastern Buddhism generally offers flowers arranged in a vase in formal arrangements, the ancient ritual of scattering flower petals survives in the ritual of Sange. In the ceremony, priests will stand and scatter brightly colored pieces of paper cut in the shape of a lotus flower petal. These paper petals are called “keha” (花葉 — “flower-petal”) and are scattered at designated places in the Shômyô chanting. Branches of real flowers are also used instead of the Kerô and Keha. In this case, branches of flowering plum or cherry are held in the priest’s hands and the flower petals picked and scattered at the appropriate time.
KESOKU — 花束 — “flowery-bundle”: This is a wooden stand of hexagonal or octagonal shape decorated with flower designs. Paper flower petals are inserted into the top of the stand to give the appearance of an open lotus flower. The Kesoku is used for offerings of Komoshi, Manju, the New Year Kagamimochi, and similar offerings of a single variety.

DANMORI — 段盛 — “tier-pile”: This is a simple stand of four circular tiers held in place by three wooden dowels. The Danmori is used when two or more varieties of fruit, vegetables, komochi, manju, etc., are offered. These food offerings are either placed on the Maejoku or on the Shumidan of the altars.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: Several musical instruments are used in the Naijin. All of them are percussion instruments which are used to mark the beginning and end of the chanting and to emphasize certain portions of the text being chanted.

DAIKIN — 大鈴 — “large-bell”: The Daikin is a large inverted bell which is struck on the outside lip with a leather covered clapper made of lacquered wood. It is placed on a cushion atop a circular stand of lacquered wood. It is placed between the first and second tables of the Mawarijoku on the right or left side of the central altar. Of Chinese origin, the Daikin is said to be in the shape of the Buddha Shakamuni’s begging bowl. The deep, resonant tone of the Daikin symbolizes the impermanence of all things.

In Jodoshinshu the Daikin is used principally to mark the beginning and end of various sections of the chanting. It is not used to accent certain portions of the text as is done in other traditions and is primarily a signalling instrument.
The beginning of the main body of the chanting is marked by one of two patterns:

KAKNYŪ — 慢急 — “slow-fast”: The Daikin is struck once, followed by a series of slow, loud beats which de-crescendo to fast, soft beats and end in the striking of the Daikin twice.

SASŌ — 作相 — “creating-form”: The Dakin is struck once, followed by fast, soft beats rising to a crescendo of slow, loud beats. The slow, loud beats then de-crescendo to fast, soft beats, followed by the striking of the Daikin twice.

In less formal services, the Daikin is simply struck twice at the beginning of the chanting.

The sound of the Daikin is the basic sound of all Buddhist music. Like the total sound of chanting voices, the sound of the Daikin contains many layers of overtones, giving it a rich, full sound rather than a single, pure note. This layering effect of Buddhist liturgical music, in both the chanting voice and in musical instruments, is its unique feature and is the musical equivalent of the Buddhist idea of the many being at the same time One.
THE FAMILY ALTAR (BUTSUDAN)

BUTSUDAN — 仏壇 — “Buddha-altar”

The Family Altar

When the Teachings of Buddha (Buddhastharma) came to America, a new development in the history of Buddhism evolved. Here, for the first time in Buddhist history, we have seen the start of a weekly Sunday service at the temple. From this, two characteristics have arisen which sociologically changed the manner in which the Buddhastharma is taught and practiced. The first is that now one’s Buddhist education takes place primarily in the temple. The second is that now this education takes place predominantly only on Sunday.

Buddhism is a religion that is often associated only with funerals and memorial services for the dead. This is a misconception that has developed out of superstition and ignorance of the Buddhastharma. Buddhism is a religion for the living. Funeral and memorial services are also for the benefit of the living. There is no benefit for the deceased in conducting a religious service. To do so would be contrary to the teachings of Jodoshinshu. The study of the Buddhastharma is intended to enhance our daily lives and awaken us to the very source of life itself...Amida Buddha. To find joy and truth in the Buddhastharma is to live each and every day to its fullest. Therefore, to designate a single day and place as appropriate, in the cultivation of our religious consciousness, would be contrary to the purport of Buddha’s teaching.

Out of their religious consciousness and devotion, the Issei pioneers have built for future generations many large and beautiful temples. The temples are extremely important because they are centers for our religious study and a guiding force for the development of our religious consciousness. The prosperity of these temples will insure the future of the Buddhastharma and will enable propagation throughout the greater society of America. Also, the development of the temples in America is a reflection of the ability of Buddhism to adapt to the social conditions and culture of its followers. But as the Buddhastharma is being transmitted to a western society and a new culture, we must be cautious against abandoning the very rich and beautiful traditions that have formed the spiritual essence of Buddhism. By installing a simple Butsudan in each home, we are not only continuing a rich tradition, but we are also bringing the very profound and compassionate teachings of Buddha into the daily lives of ourselves and our children.

For all Buddhists, the Butsudan has a deep spiritual meaning for each individual in the family. The Butsudan and the practice of maintenance serves as a mirror for each individual to see their true self and to fully awaken one’s religious consciousness. Since the Buddhastharma is intended to enhance our daily lives and awaken us to the conditions that sustains this life, the Butsudan is always located centrally within the household dwelling. Its obvious presence is a practice to overcome our own ignorance and enable us to listen more diligently to the Buddhastharma.

History

The teachings of Buddha began in India over 2,500 years ago. For approximately 200 years after the death of Shakamuni Buddha, there were no sketches or carvings of the image of Buddha. At the time it was considered sacrilegious since it is impossible to create the form of Buddhahood or Ultimate Truth. However, following the first expedition of Alexander the Great to India in 327 B.C., the first images of Buddha began to be carved. Up until this time, the only objects of reverence for Buddhists were the Sharira...
(relics or ashes) of Shakamuni Buddha. The Sharira were enshrined on the top of stupas located throughout India. The best known are the stupas of Bharhut, Bodhgaya, and Sanchi. In Japan the Sharira were enshrined at the foot of metal columns (קוקין - Kurin), which were placed atop three- and five-storied pagodas.

The first historical images of Buddha were carved out of stone and appeared in the northwest region of India called Gandhara (present day northern Pakistan) in about the first century B.C. This type of sculpture reflects a tremendous amount of Greek influence and is referred to as the Gandhara style. At about the same time, images appeared in the Ganges River region. These stone images were referred to as Mathura. It was the Mathura style of making images that accompanied the spread of the Buddhadharma throughout Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan. As the Buddhadharma flourished, correspondingly, the practice of making images of Buddha prospered.

In the year 685 A.D., during the reign of the Japanese Emperor Tenmu, an imperial order was declared encouraging every household to construct an altar with a dais where an image of Buddha and a sutra could be enshrined for the purpose of family services. According to old records, this practice never met with widespread acceptance. During the 13th century, the followers of Jodoshinshu had begun to construct their own Butsudan. However, it was not until the 17th century, following an order of the Tokugawa Shogunate, that the Butsudan became a general practice throughout the country. This policy by the Tokugawa Shogunate was intended to counter the spread of Christianity in Japan. But, for Jodoshinshu Buddhists, the idea of a Butsudan has always been a deep part of Jodoshinshu tradition from the days beginning with Shinran Shōnin.

During the early days of Jodoshinshu in Japan, there were no temples established as we know them today. In those days, the followers of Jodoshinshu had met in what was called a “Dōjō” (道場) or “place to practice”. Practice implied listening to the Buddhadharma. It was common that each follower or household had enshrined its own scroll with Amida Buddha’s name (Myōgō —) inscribed on it. For these followers, this scroll became a place in the home deeply saturated with the hue of spirituality. As the teachings of Jodoshinshu spread throughout the countryside, correspondingly, the practice of enshrining a Myōgō prospered. Today we recognize this practice as the Butsudan or family altar.

**Adornments**

The Butsudan is essentially a very simple place where we may enshrine a Myōgō, portrait or statue of Amida Buddha. The most priceless adornment that any Butsudan may have is the outpouring of gratitude for the Wisdom and Compassion of Buddha. The ornaments and decorations that we are used to seeing in a Butsudan vary greatly. It may be an ornament, a carving, gold or a colored decoration. Nevertheless, they are all referred to as adornments. All of the adornments that we see in the Butsudan have a very strong basis in the sutras. There are countless referrals to these adornments and that is why they have become very common in the Butsudan. But we must be aware of the meaning of “adornment”, especially as it is used in the Three Sutras of Pure Land Buddhism.

Adornments are essentially only symbols or external emblems of Ultimate Truth or Reality. This Truth is ineffable. It is void of taste, color or thought. But yet, these adornments are relative expressions of this Truth and are a means to bring us closer in understanding this Truth as the Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha. The acquisition of various adornments in the family Butsudan may seem to be only an extension of the wealth of the household, but it can also be an expression of one's understanding and gratitude for the teaching of Wisdom and Compassion.
For the family Butsudan, all that is necessary is a Myōgō, portrait or statue of Amida Buddha. This Myōgō, portrait or statue is adorned with flowers, a candle, and an incense burner. This is all that is necessary. Any other adornments such as lanterns, special dais, goldwork, etc. are not necessary. The articles of the family Butsudan should be centrally located within the household. They may be arranged on a table, shelf or prepared along a wall. Again, it must be remembered that there is no “right” or “proper” way. What is most important is the attitude of the household.

Central Image of Reverence:

Traditionally, statues, portraits or scrolls written with Buddha’s Name were enshrined in the altars of Jodoshinshu Buddhists. During the time of Shinran, it was common to see wooden statues of Buddha in the temples. However, in the “Dōjō” and homes of the followers of Jodoshinshu, the hanging scroll was most prominent. It is believed that even Shinran had preferred the hanging scroll. This tradition of high regard for the written scrolls was emphasized by Rennyo Shōnin.

“In other traditions preference is given to painted images of the Buddha over a scroll bearing the Name, to wooden images over the painted images; in our tradition preference is given to painted images over wooden images, to the Name over painted images.”

—Rennyo Goichidai Kikigaki

The scroll most commonly found in the family Butsudan is that which contains a portrait of Amida Buddha or one written with the Six-Character Name (六字名号—Rokuji Myōgō) of Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu (南無阿弥陀佛). This is the Myōgō that is generally used in the utterance of the Nembutsu. Either one of these two scrolls or a statue of Buddha may be enshrined as the central image of reverence.

In some of the larger family Butsudan, there are often three images of reverence. In the center is located the statue, portrait or Name of Buddha. On the right (as you face the Butsudan) we may see a hanging scroll with the Ten-Character Name (十字名号—Jūji Myōgō) of Ki-myo-jin-jip-po mu-ge-ko-nyo-rai (帰命尽十方無碍光如來—I take refuge in the Tathagata of inconceivable light filling the ten quarters) or a portrait of the founder of Jodoshinshu, Shinran Shōnin. On the left, we may see a hanging scroll with the nine-character Name (九字名号—Kuji Myōgō) of Na-mu-fu-ka-shi-gi-ko-nyo-rai (南無不可思議光如來—I take refuge in the Tathagata of inconceivable light) or a portrait of Rennyo Shōnin, who is considered to be the restorer of Jodoshinshu in Japan. This arrangement corresponds to the one found in most temple altar settings.

Candles:

“No one can see anything in the darkness without light. Candlelight is the symbol of the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha which illumine the darkness and ignorance of human beings. The candle flame is always flickering and moving in the breeze. If the breeze is strong enough, the candlelight will be extinguished. Like this, the breeze is ignorance or darkness which always tries to destroy wisdom or light. In this sense, therefore, it is better to have candlelight than electric light, since electric light will never be extinguished by mere breeze. Because of the wisdom of the Buddha, we shall be able to be freed from our passions and be enlightened. Candle lighting is the symbol of spiritual light or wisdom in the darkness of life.”

—Buddhist Handbook for Shinshu Followers
Shoyu Hanayama

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Traditionally, only white candles are used during the religious service. On special designated occasions such as Shinran Shōnin’s birthday (Gotanye), red or specially colored candles are used. Following the end of all religious services, the candles are extinguished by a quick fanning motion of the hand or by using a candle snuffer. The flame of the candle must never be extinguished by the blowing of one’s breath.

**Flowers:**

Throughout the sutras, there are countless referrals to the offering of flowers. It is said that to offer even a single flower, one creates a connection with the Buddha. Therefore it is not necessary to offer an entire bouquet at all times.

Flowers are very beautiful, and in this sense almost anything can be offered in substitution. But, flowers are very symbolic of the impermanence of this life and serve as a reminder of the necessity to awaken to the Ultimate Truth of Wisdom and Compassion. The flowers we offer are cut from the stems. Although we place them in water and they continue to live for some time, they are nevertheless dying. But yet, we are able to appreciate their beauty. The flower is very beautiful, vibrant and full of life. As human beings, we too are dying from the instant we are born. Therefore, flowers are not offered as mere decorations, they are a constant reminder of our human existence.

Traditionally, any flower in season may be used as an offering. However, poisonous and thorny flowers should be avoided, if possible. In some of the larger family Butsudan, there are upper and lower shelves with vases. This corresponds to the arrangement found on many temple altar settings. In the vases on the upper level, evergreens are customarily placed to symbolize longevity. If at all possible, artificial flowers should not be offered.

**Incense:**

There are many references to the use of incense in the sutras and there are countless similes and metaphors given in the commentaries. But essentially, incense has been traditionally associated with cleanliness. It is a way to provide a fresh and pure scent in the home and temple, both enhancing the religious atmosphere of the place of reverence and of the follower.

One simile of incense is that the human body is like incense itself. While the smoke of incense rises, it releases a beautiful scent which fills the room. The human body is likened to this as long as breath and life rises from it.

The offering of both flowers and incense are also referred to as a means of praising the Buddha. They are expressions of thankfulness and gratitude in deep recognition of those causes of our existence and those conditions which sustain this existence.

Traditionally, the long incense sticks are not placed in a standing position in the burner. They are broken into appropriate lengths and then laid into the burner. There is no rule regarding the number of sticks of incense used.

**Food Offerings:**

Within the Jodoshinshu tradition, only rice offerings are made except on special occasions. However, rice, sweets, vegetables and fruits are traditionally offered before the family Butusdan. These offerings are not only given in recognition of those who have passed away on the debt of gratitude that we owe them, they are also expressions of our thankfulness and gratitude for being able to hear the very beautiful teachings of Namuamidabutsu.
In Asia, rice is the staple product, and naturally has become accepted as the traditional offering. It is very common to see an offering of rice being made in the morning. This is the first serving taken from the first meal of each day. To begin each new day with such a feeling is a total expression of thankfulness and gratitude. Of course, in the United States, rice is not the staple food and we rarely would eat or prepare rice in the morning. In this case, any offering of the morning meal is appropriate. Also in the United States, dinner is the main meal and an offering from the food prepared would be more appropriate. What is important to remember is that the food offerings are an expression of thankfulness and gratitude for those causes for our existence and those conditions that sustain this existence. It is to be grateful for those who have departed before us and for being given this opportunity to hear the teachings of Buddha.

**Family Death Register, Memorial Tablet, and Photographs of the Deceased:**

Through the Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha, we receive those conditions which sustain this existence. The sole object of our reverence is this Wisdom and Compassion, manifested in our daily lives as Namuamidabutsu. Therefore, the Butsudan should not be used to enshrine the deceased.

Traditionally, the Memorial Tablet (位牌—Ihai) is not used in Jodoshinshu. However, it is a very common practice to have a Memorial Tablet made. If this is the case, the Memorial Tablet should be placed on the side of the Butsudan and never in the center. This also applies to any photographs of the deceased. They must be placed within a close proximity to the Butsudan, but never within it. The Family Death Register is a record of the family ancestors and may be kept in one corner but never in the center. All of the aforementioned items are important and hold a very emotional and sentimental place in the hearts and minds of all families. However, although such reminders may bring us closer to the Butsudan, we must not forget that the sole object of our reverence is Amida Buddha. Here we may find the very crux of our karmic ties.

**Dharma Name (法名—Hömyö)**

The cards inscribed with a Hömyö for the deceased or living should be place in a drawer or compartment of the Butsudan.

**Arrangement of Butsudan Articles.**

Essentially, the components comprising the family Butsudan are the central image of reverence (Myōgō, portrait or statue of Amida Buddha), a flower vase, candlestand and an incense burner. The arrangement of these three articles that adorn the central image of reverence is referred to as “mitsu gusoku”. In some family Butsudan, we may sometimes see two candlestands and two flower vases. This arrangement is called “go gusoku”, and is normally used only on special occasions. The mitsu gusoku arrangement, however, is the traditionally accepted one for daily practice and most observances.

As you are facing the central image of reverence, the candlestand is always placed on your right side of the central image. The flower vase is always placed to the left and the incense burner is placed in the center. Any food offering is always placed on a special vessel (Bukki) or on a plate and is always situated directly in front of the central image of reverence. A small bell (Rin) is placed in front of the Butsudan arrangement towards the right side.

In many family altars, there is a brightly colored triangular brocade cloth called an Uchishiki. The uchishiki is taken from the triangular straw mat or cloth that the historical Buddha Shakamuni sat upon while lecturing. In the Butsudan, the necessary articles are arranged atop the Uchishiki. In the event of a death of a family member, the
Uchishiki is turned over exposing a plain white material. White is traditionally the color associated with death, and the Uchishiki is kept with the white side exposed until the 49th Day Memorial Service for the deceased. During this time, brightly colored flowers, especially red, should be avoided.

Butsudan

A — Myōgō, Portrait, or Statue of Amida Buddha  
(central image of Reverence)
B — Portrait of Shinran Shōnin or 10-Character Name  
(Juji Myōgō)
C — Portrait of Rennyo Shōni or 6 Character Name  
(Kuji Myōgō)
D — Buppanki
Daily Practice

Traditionally, both morning and evening observances should be held at the family Butsudan by all family members, whether individually or as a group, regardless of length or simplicity. This may be in the form of Gassho-Raihai, Oshoko (incense offering), recitation of Nembutsu (Namuamidabutsu) or sutra chanting. What is most important is that the observance is an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving for the benevolence of Buddha. Such an attitude should be cultivated so that the daily Butsudan observances may become an integral part of one's daily life.

For families with young children, it is most important that the children experience daily family Butsudan services in order to cultivate an appreciation and understanding of Buddhism in their everyday life. A designated time, such as early morning or upon return from the day's activities, should be established for the children. They may offer their reverence alone or as a family group. One suggested practice is to have the children conduct their own service. They may strike the Rin (bell) once, gassho and recite Namuamidabutsu. Such a practice encourages the child in developing a spiritual consciousness and avoids the fire dangers often associated with candles and incense.

Since the Butsudan represents the spiritual heart of the family home, it should always be kept as clean and beautiful as possible. Fresh flowers should always be placed before the Butsudan, and since flowers are representative of impermanence, the use of artificial flowers is to be discouraged. The food offerings (Osonaye) have traditionally been rice, but as a gesture of gratitude and thanksgiving, any offering from the daily menu will suffice. However, during New Year's, mochi (Okagami) is traditionally offered; on Ohigan, Dango; on Hanamatsuri, sweet tea and flowers; and on Obon Somen, fruits and vegetables.